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AN ESTIMATE OF THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AND STATE OF GREAT BRITAIN,

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF A

SERMON,

PREACHED ON FRIDAY, APRIL 19th, 1793,

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST,

AT THE

LOCK CHAPEL,

AND

ST. MILDRED'S CHURCH, BREAD-STREET;

BY THOMAS SCOTT,

CHAPLAIN of the LOCK HOSPITAL, and Afternoon LECTURER at the said CHURCH.

Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?

2 Chron. c. XXVIII, v. 10.

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MDCCXCIII.

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N. B. The Sermon, of which the ſubſtance is here publiſhed, was not delivered exactly alike in the two places where it was preached; and ſome further immaterial variations have been made, in preparing it for the preſs: eſpecially ſome obſervations are added concerning prayer and faſting, from a Sermon preached the Lord's Day before, by way of preparation for the duties of the appointed ſeaſon.

BRITISH MUSEUM

A

SERMON, &c.

ISAIAH. CH. V. VER. IV.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY VINEYARD, THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHEREFORE WHEN I LOOKED, THAT IT SHOULD BRING FORTH GRAPES, BROUGHT IT FORTH WILD GRAPES?

I TRUST, we do not forget, that humiliation before God for our ſins, as individuals, and as a nation, conſtitutes the great buſineſs of this day. We ſhould have no reaſon to doubt of the divine aſſiſtance in endeavouring to preſerve our civil and religious privileges againſt the aſſaults of any provoked enemies; did not our manifold offences againſt God render us deſerving of his righteous indignation. Inſtead, therefore, of engroſſing your attention by diſcuſſing party queſtions, which often cauſe men to "faſt for ſtrife and debate," I would endeavour to aſſiſt your meditation upon ſuch ſubjects, as connect with the great deſign of our aſſembling together at this time.

The old Teſtament is peculiarly uſeful, in teaching us the rules, by which the Lord dealeth with Nations,

Nations, according to their conduct. Individuals will exiſt in another world, and "after death is "the judgment:" ſo that no exact retribution is awarded to them in this life, for "the wicked are "reſerved to the day of judgment to be puniſhed:" but collective Bodies will have no future ſubſiſtence, as ſuch; and, therefore, their recompence is here appointed them. To aſcertain the method of divine providence, in this reſpect, we muſt mark the difference between the nations, which are favoured with the light of revelation and the ordinances of God and thoſe that are deſtitute of theſe and other peculiar advantages: and we muſt alſo recollect, that when nations, highly privileged in every reſpect, are otherwiſe ripe for judgments, their ſtate is often prolonged for the ſake of the pious remnant that is found among them. Where much is given, much will be required; and the ſame degree of impiety and vice, when found in nations peculiarly favoured with the means of inſtruction, has vaſtly more criminality in it, and fills up the meaſure of iniquity much more rapidly, than when found in places deſtitute of ſuch advantages. Yet at the ſame time, the ſtate of ſuch nations may be prolonged; becauſe there is amongſt them a number of perſons, whoſe prayers, examples and endeavours counteract the general tendency to total depravation.

In the paſſage of Scripture, whence our text is ſelected, the Lord, by his prophet, in a moſt beautiful parable manifeſts the peculiar care that had

had been ſhewn towards Iſrael, eſpecially in reſpect of their religious advantages: "He had given to "them his ſtatutes and ordinances; he had not "dealt ſo with any nation; neither had the hea-"then the knowledge of his laws." And, as the advantage of a parable principally conſiſts in ſhewing to men, as in a mirrour, the real ſtate of the caſe, diveſted of their own concern in it, that they may be compelled to decide againſt themſelves, by their judgment in reſpect of the parabolical deſcription: ſo the Lord appealed to "the inhabi-"tants of Jeruſalem, and the men of Judah, to "decide betwixt him and his Vineyard, and to "determine, whether any thing could have been "done to make it fruitful, which he had not done in "it?" Why then did it only bear wild or poiſon-ous grapes, when good grapes might have been expected from it? A ſimilar appeal will at length be made to every man; and though now ſelf love warps the judgment, yet the Lord will at laſt condemn none, who will not be conſtrained to condemn themſelves, and to juſtify him in their condemnation.

The nation, under the ſimilitude of a Vineyard, being thus brought in guilty; the Lord next pro-ceeded to denounce ſentence againſt it; declaring, that he would "take away the hedge thereof, and "it ſhould be eaten up; and break down the wall "thereof, and it ſhould be trodden down; that "he would lay it waſte; that it ſhould not be "pruned or digged, but that there ſhould come

" up briers and thorns; and that he would alſo " command the clouds, that they ſhould rain no " rain upon it." The ſentence, here pronounced, was not executed till about 200 years afterwards; for Hezekiah, and Joſiah, with Iſaiah and other prophets, and a remnant of pious perſons, by their labours and prayers prevailed for " the lengthening " of their tranquillity:" but at length the believing remnant ceaſed, and then the ſentence came upon the nation, by the Babyloniſh captivity. Yet it was more awfully accompliſhed, after the coming of Chriſt, and his crucifixion at the inſtance of the Jewiſh rulers, prieſts and people, with the ſubſequent perſecution of chriſtianity: for then the nation was caſt out of the viſible church, Jeruſalem was given up into the hands of the Romans, and hath ever ſince been trodden under foot of the gentiles; the Jews have been ſcattered into all nations, and the Lord hath indeed " commanded " the clouds to rain no rain upon them," to this day. Thus they are left to be reluctant preachers to the nations profeſſing Chriſtianity, of the truth of their holy Religion, and the dreadful conſequences of neglecting it.

Iſrael indeed was dealt with according to a peculiar covenant: yet their caſe did not very materially differ from that of any nation, that is favoured with the clear light of the goſpel: and if it ſhould be enquired what nation is the Iſrael of the new diſpenſation? I could not heſitate in anſwering Britain, both in reſpect of advantages, and a rebellious ungrateful abuſe of them. This may ſuffice to introduce our ſubject, and to warrant an

entire application of the paſſage before us to our own caſe, as we are this day called to examine into it.

Let us then proſecute the enquiry, by conſidering,

I. The peculiar favours, with which a kind providence has diſtinguiſhed our native land.

II. The improvement which we ought to have made of them.

III. The wild grapes, which the Lord finds in this his Vineyard.

IV. The conſequence, that may be expected, unleſs ſomething effectual be done to prevent it.

V. To what we may attribute our preſervation hitherto. And,

VI. What the duties are, to which we are now called, according to our different Stations in the church and the community. Nothing more than a very compendious View of theſe ſeveral important Subjects can be compriſed within the limits aſſigned to this diſcourſe.

I. We conſider the peculiar favours, by which a kind providence hath diſtinguiſhed our native land.

We have long been exempted from the calamities of war, that tremendous ſcourge of a righteous

teous God, by which he punishes guilty nations. Few of us know any thing more of war, than we have learned from the public papers or the page of history. We feel it indeed, when it takes place; but how? Trade suffers a temporary check, and additional taxes are demanded of us; a number of not very useful members of the community are furnished with a perilous or fatal employment, and a few more valuable persons are exposed to the same dangers with them. But we have scarce any other idea of war, as it respects ourselves: and this has often a very bad effect upon the minds of men; for they consider war no otherwise, than as it affects their property, and are, therefore, prone to engage in it too lightly, when it yields a prospect of temporal advantage, without duly reflecting on its consequences on the lives and souls of men, or on those regions that are exposed to its tremendous ravages.

Our situation happily renders us incapable even of conceiving in imagination, those scenes, which are really exhibited on the theatre of war continually: the devastations of the open country, with all its productions; rendering abortive the labours, and disappointing the expectation of the husbandman, and spoiling the bounty of a kind providence: the burning of cities; the cries of widows and orphans; the reeking blood, and mangled bodies of the slaughtered; the groans, and ghastly appearance of the wounded and dying; the penury, and pining want of the survivors; the terrors of the night, and the horrors of the day, must baffle all description; let who will be the aggressor

greſſor or the victor in the War. So that the humane mind muſt be diſpoſed to weep over, not only the moſt ſplendid, but even the moſt needful victories: and war, in every caſe, muſt be deemed the triumph or the harveſt of the firſt great murderer, the devil. What then muſt be our obligations to the Lord of Hoſts, who hath preſerved us hitherto from the experience of ſuch miſeries; and hath granted our native country an exemption from this dire judgment for a longer courſe of years, than hath almoſt ever been experienced by any other Nation?

We have alſo been equally preſerved from the ſore judgments of famine, peſtilence, earthquakes, and deſolating hurricanes: plenty, health, and a ſerene and temperate climate have been vouchſafed us: a land abounding with all the bleſſings, that we can deſire, and exempted from moſt of the calamities, to which other lands are expoſed, hath fallen to our lot: and let us not ſo regard ſecond cauſes, as to forget the firſt great Cauſe of all, who "doeth what he will in the armies of heaven, "and among the inhabitants of the earth."

We might here enlarge on the bleſſings of our well poiſed conſtitution, and equal laws; by which the perſonal liberty and property of every individual are ſecured, if not to the greateſt degree which is poſſible in the preſent ſtate of human nature. yet at leaſt, beyond what hath hitherto been reduced to practice, for any length of time in any nation of the earth. Much hath been ſaid of Grecian and Roman liberty: but it is well known that a very large proportion of the people, in thoſe

admired

admired nations, were ſlaves, the property of their maſters: and equal freedom was not poſſeſſed among them in any meaſure comparable to what it is in Britain. Imperfection muſt be found in every thing, in which man is concerned; and it is deſirable to redreſs every grievance, ſo ſoon as it is noticed: but we may ſurely be allowed to value, and be thankful for, our preſent advantages; till we are ſhewn more concluſively, than by well-penned pamphlets and ingenious ſpeculations, that ſomething much better is practicable among men. But 'tis enough to expreſs thus briefly my ſentiments concerning our conſtitution, and to teſtify, that I deem it one of the ſpecial favours of a kind providence to our native land.

But theſe are comparatively inferior conſiderations: our religious advantages are principally to be valued. When the Son of God was manifeſted to deſtroy the works of the devil; this land was enveloped in the groſſeſt idolatry, barbarity, and ignorance: yet it was not long before the Sun of Righteouſneſs, which aroſe at ſo great a diſtance, viſited it with his ſacred beams of life and ſalvation. After a time the ſuperſtitions, corruptions, and uſurpations of the Romiſh church, like a dark cloud obſcured this heavenly light: but the firſt dawning of the bleſſed reformation extended its influence into this Iſland, and our progenitors were numbered among thoſe favoured nations, which were firſt emancipated from that ſlavery, and delivered from that groſs darkneſs, that had long oppreſſed the weſtern world. Others, after an ineffectual ſtruggle, and much bloodſhed, were again

reduced

reduced to bondage, under the perfecuting tyranny of the Pontiff and his affociates; this land in the reign of bloody Mary was in peculiar danger of falling again under the fame yoke: but God preferved his light among us by removing her, and advancing Elizabeth to the throne: and after defeating the fubtle and powerful machinations of our enemies, in a variety of inftances: He at length, by the happy Revolution at the clofe of the laft century, eftablifhed among us a degree of civil and religious liberty, which hath rendered us the admiration or envy of all our neighbours.

Whilft therefore, the nations to which the Gofpel was firft vouchfafed, are reduced to a condition of the moft deplorable ignorance; this diftant region is enlightened in every part of it with the beams of heavenly truth. An excellent tranflation of the facred Scriptures into our own language is put into our hands, and we are allowed, invited, and encouraged to read it. Copies of the Bible are fo common and cheap, that almoft every perfon may afford to purchafe one; and if any cannot, or will not fpare a trifle for this purpofe, bleffed be God, there are perfons difpofed to give it to them: nay, if any know not how to read the Word of life, there are thofe, who are ready to pay for their inftruction, provided the poor be willing to learn. So that none can plead that they are wholly deftitute of the means of being made wife unto eternal Salvation. At the dawning of the reformation, our anceftors were thankful for a few leaves of the holy Scriptures in an imperfect Engliſh tranſlation, and read them with the greateſt avidity

When Bibles were first placed in the churches, the people throng'd to hear them read, with an eagerneſs, of which we have little conception: and in ſome parts of Wales at preſent, Bibles in that language are ſo ſcarce, that frequently ſeveral families jointly poſſeſs one, and have it a week at a time in rotation. This ſhould teach us to value and improve our privileges, that ſcarcity may not make the word of God precious to us. A great variety alſo of other pious books are circulated at very low prices, and even *gratis*, which are ſuited to excite men's attention to the Bible, and to aſſiſt them in underſtanding it; whilſt they are taught and encouraged to compare them all with that ſacred ſtandard, that they may learn to diſtinguiſh between the precious, and the vile. At the ſame time, no reſtraint is impoſed on the preachers of God's Word; nor are any forbidden to attend on their inſtructions; and numbers, in almoſt all parts of the land are employed in publiſhing the glad tidings of Salvation, with a clearneſs and plainneſs, that hath ſeldom been exceeded. So that, we are peculiarly favoured with every advantage for becoming wiſe, holy, and happy: this hath been our felicity for a long courſe of years: and, when we conſider how ſcarce in compariſon copies of the Scripture were in Iſrael, and how much darker their diſpenſation was, than that of the Goſpel; we ſhall be conſtrained to allow, (notwithſtanding the prophets who were raiſed up among them,) that they did not poſſeſs religious privileges equal to thoſe of our favoured land: ſo that the Lord may well demand of us, as a nation, what could have been done more for us, that hath not been done, as a proper means of rendering us a re-

ligious and a righteous Nation? This leads us to enquire

II. What improvement we ought to have made of theſe advantages?

The Lord looks for grapes from this well cultured vine; he requires righteouſneſs and judgment from a people ſo highly favoured. (v. 8.) To ſpeak after the manner of men, it might have been expected, that all orders amongſt us from the higheſt to the loweſt, would, in their public and private conduct, have manifeſted a ſerious regard to the truths, precepts, ordinances, providence and glory of God. Sobriety, temperance, chaſtity, juſtice, truth, peace, and love ſhould have been obſervable in our national character, and in all our tranſactions. They that come amongſt us, and they among whom we go, ſhould have been conſtrained to confeſs, that probity, ſincerity, humanity, piety, meekneſs and purity abounded amongſt us more than other nations, in proportion to our ſuperior advantages. Impiety and immorality ſhould at leaſt have been diſcountenanced, driven into corners, put to ſhame, or dragged out to condign puniſhment, if it could not have been totally ſuppreſſed: and it ſhould have been ſhewn, by all our laws, legiſlators, magiſtrates, and public meaſures at home and abroad, as well as in the conduct of the inferior orders, and of thoſe employed in the ſacred miniſtry, that we were a nation fearing God and working righteouſneſs, a wiſe and underſtanding people, whom the Lord had choſen

to himself, for his own inheritance. Who can deny, that this ought to have been our national character? Who can excuse what is contrary to this, without palliating ingratitude, as well as impiety and iniquity? or who can account for it, without allowing that the heart of man *is* deceitful and desperately wicked? For, alas! the case of numbers gives us occasion to enquire with Solomon, "wherefore is there a price in the hand "of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart "to it." (Prov. xvii. v. 16.)

We proceed, therefore,

III. To consider the wild, or poisonous grapes, which the Lord finds in his vineyard, instead of the good fruits for which he looked.

I do not intend, at present to descant on such vices, as are common to men, at all times, and in all places; but [illegible] to select some instances, which may be deemed peculiar to this age and nation: remembering, that the Lord requires his servants, on these occasions, "to cry aloud, and "not spare, to lift up their voice like a trumpet, "whilst they shew his professing people their sins "and transgressions;" as we found it written in that chapter, which with peculiar propriety was appointed for the first lesson, in our morning service. And I would remind you, that what may be spoken of national sins, should be applied by each of us to our own particular transgressions; as guilty individuals belonging to a guilty community. All our violations of the divine law, and

all our neglect, contempt, or abuſe of the goſpel, from our infancy to the preſent day, conſtitute a part of that accumulated guilt, for which the Lord hath a controverſy with our land: and it is incumbent upon us, as we proceed, to enquire concerning every particular charge, whether we have not formerly committed, or countenanced the ſpecified iniquity? whether we have uſed all our influence to prevent others from committing it? And what our conduct in theſe reſpects is at this preſent time? Thus we ſhall avoid the abſurd hypocriſy of pretending to humble ourſelves before God, whilſt we are merely reflecting on the ſins of other men, without confeſſing, mourning over, or forſaking our own.

I. The daring infidelity, and damnable hereſies, which prevail amongſt us, may well be adduced as one of our national ſins. I ſay *damnable hereſies*; for this is the language of ſcripture, and much miſchief has been done by calling enormous evils by ſoft names; which ſeduces men into a forgetfulneſs of their malignity. I would not, however, be underſtood to mean every deviation from the ſyſtem of divine truth. Much hay, ſtraw, ſtubble, may be built on the precious foundation, which God hath laid in Zion; and though the builder will ſuffer loſs, yet he may be ſaved, as by fire: ſo that all miſtakes are not *damnable hereſies*; and it would be arrogance in any of us to ſuppoſe, that our creed is wholly free from ſuch worthleſs mixtures. "But other foundation can no man "lay, than that, which is laid, even Chriſt Jeſus." The truths reſpecting his perſon, as God manifeſted

"in

"in the flesh," his ſacrifice, and mediation, and the ſanctifying work of his ſpirit, are inſeparable from chriſtianity, and ſtand, or fall with the authority of the ſcripture, and our reverence for it. I muſt, therefore, be allowed confidently, to maintain that the apoſtles, if living, would pronounce many modern dogmas to be damnable hereſies, ſubverſive of the foundation: more plauſible indeed, but no better, than infidelity; to which by an eaſy tranſition they evidently tend.

We ſeem, almoſt univerſally, to ſtand as it were, aghaſt, at the atheiſm and daring impiety of that nation, with which we are at war: and indeed we cannot too much execrate their principles and practices; which ſeem to conſtitute a new exhibition of the deceitfulneſs and deſperate wickedneſs of the human heart: but if we infer, that France is, as a nation, more criminal in the ſight of God, than Britain; we may perhaps be found partial in our judgment. We are not competent to decide on ſuch a complicated queſtion, which involves in it all our advantages, and their diſadvantages: nor can the deciſion be at all neceſſary for our hope of deliverance, or conducive to our humiliation. In one reſpect we act more wiſely than our opponents; for they inſult the God of heaven, ſet him at defiance, and, as it were, declare war againſt him, as well as againſt mankind: whereas, we make our appeal to him, and call publicly on him for aſſiſtance, whilſt we confeſs ourſelves deſerving of his righteous indignation.

On

On the other hand, it muſt be allowed, that the atheiſm and impiety of France want many of thoſe aggravations, which are found in our infidelity, and rejection of revealed faith. Few among them were previouſly acquainted with the holy Scriptures, having been diſcouraged from reading and examining them. The religion, which they had witneſſed, was in general a compound of groſs abſurdities, unmeaning forms, human inventions, and prieſtly uſurpations or impoſitions; which only needed to be expoſed, to become the objects of contempt and abhorrence. Voltaire, and other ingenious faſcinating infidels, were the apoſtles of their reformation; the ideas of civil liberty and irreligion entered into their minds at the ſame time, and thus were aſſociated together: there was no one at hand to ſet before them true chriſtianity, in its genuine beauty and ſimplicity, when they turned from their old ſuperſtition with diſguſt; and no wonder they greedily imbibed the ſentiments of thoſe, who had emancipated them from their former abject ſlavery, and that they even carried their principles further than their maſters had done.

But the partial, or total infidelity, which rapidly ſpreads amongſt us, is of another kind. Men, who have been inſtructed from their youth, in the principles of chriſtianity, and who want neither talents, opportunity, liberty, or encouragement for free enquiry, have deliberately and decidedly given the oracles of reaſon a preference to the oracles of God! The deiſts, who ſome time back, oppoſed the divine authority of the ſcripture, have been completely baffled in the open field of argument; and no man now ventures forth, as an adverſary on that

ground,

ground, which has been found abſolutely untenable. Yet their ſucceſſors, though they know this, perſiſt in their oppoſition to revelation, either altogether, or by rejecting as much as is incompatible with their ſeveral ſyſtems. They ſtart objections, and hold forth ſcriptural doctrines, or facts to deriſion, by a diſtorted partial ſtatement: they cavil at them, with a ſupercilious ſneer: they affect the reputation of ſuperior diſcernment, by treating their forefathers as bigots and fanatics, and by holding in ſovereign contempt thoſe of their cotemporaries, whom they dare not face in the open field of calm diſpaſſionate argument: thus they addreſs the ſelf-ſufficiency, and love of the world, which predominate in inexperienced young perſons: they circulate their objections in periodical publications, mix them up with criticiſm, hiſtory, and other works of genius and erudition; and gild over the mental poiſon, thus adminiſtered in ſmall doſes, with every thing that can render it pleaſing and unſuſpected: they retail, by all poſſible methods, thoſe objections againſt the ſcripture hiſtory, and the principal doctrines of revelation, which have been repeatedly and ſolidly anſwered, inſinuating more than they chuſe to *avow*; and they are almoſt as zealous in diſſeminating their antichriſtian principles, as the primitive preachers were in ſpreading the goſpel of God our Saviour.

Thus it hath come to paſs, that in a land, full of bibles, and means of underſtanding them; and greatly favoured with faithful preachers; that an increaſing multitude affect to ſpeak of revelation with doubt or ſuſpicion, if not with avowed con-

tempt

tempt and averſion: numbers aſpire to the reputation of wit and penetration, by ridiculing or railing at the contents of the ſcripture: and others ſtudy the art of explaining away whatever they diſlike. So that the pride of human wiſdom and human virtue, (connected with "the carnal mind which is "enmity againſt God,") hath almoſt prevailed to explode the Bible as an antiquated book; or at leaſt to bring it into neglect, as not entitled to much credit, and as having no authority over the conſciences and conduct of mankind: whilſt the prevailing maxim is, *that it is no matter what men believe, if they behave properly to their fellow creatures.* This has been our unhappy progreſs, during the laſt century; though chriſtianity has at the ſame time been ſet before us, peculiarly unincumbered with ſuperſtition, or intolerance, (and not remarkably deformed by enthuſiaſm,) in its genuine ſimplicity and amiableneſs, as ſuited to render mankind wiſe, holy, and happy. Such is the ſtamp of modern infidelity in Britain; and we have reaſon to fear, that it will ſtill diffuſe its baleful influence more widely among our poſterity. As a nation, this ſeems likely to be our condemnation, "that light is come among us; and we have "loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe *our* "*deeds are evil.*" (John, c. iii. v. 19—21.) The contempt, with which God's word is treated, in a nation, which hath been ſo long and ſo greatly favoured with it, is an awful ſign of the times, and cannot but be exceedingly provoking to him; and it muſt tend, in a rapid manner, to fill up the meaſure of our national iniquity.

2. Connected with this, we may notice the general neglect of God's ordinances, and the profanation of his holy day, which diſtinguiſh the age in which we live.

Not long ſince it was cuſtomary to inſert in advertiſements of ſtage coaches and waggons "*Sundays excepted:* but this decent regard to that day, which the Lord Jeſus claims as his own, (Rev. c. 1. v. 10,) is now thought ſuperfluous; and *Sundays not excepted,* either in ſetting out, or proceeding on, the journey, is avowedly a part of the preſent plan: whilſt multiplied Sunday newſpapers, publicly ſold in the ſtreets, furniſh employment for thoſe who amuſe themſelves at home, and ſuperſede the duties of the cloſet, the family, or the houſe of God. No wonder that legiſlators and magiſtrates *care for none of theſe things*; when the Lord's day is generally ſelected by *them*, and all thoſe in the higher ranks of ſociety, (nay, by many who bear a ſacred character,) as the moſt convenient day for travelling! whilſt not a few of them call together their acquaintance, for every kind of diſſipation, or even for gaming on this day of ſacred reſt! Thus multitudes are permitted without moleſtation, to carry on their buſineſs; and ſtill greater numbers of the lower orders flock to ſcenes of riot or diverſion, corrupting each others morals, and waſting that which ſhould maintain their families. The tradeſman, (and even the ſtateſman,) makes the Lord's day his ſeaſon of relaxation and indulgence; taverns, alehouſes, tea gardens are thronged, and no means uſed to prevent it: the places of worſhip are deſerted; and even the form of religion is

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growing into diſuſe, throughout the land; but eſpecially in the metropolis and it's vicinity.

At the ſame time, many who ſeem to be religious, meet their friends at the place of worſhip, and go home to feaſt with them: their converſe may be about religion, and they may outwardly attend to ſome of its duties: but their ſervants have a double portion of work, to provide for the entertainment: it is to them a day of buſtle and fatigue; and they have no time allowed them for the care of their ſouls, or the duties of religion!

All theſe things combined together may well be conſidered as a plain teſtimony, how much we have ſinned againſt the light, and how greatly we diſreliſh the reaſonable ſervice of our God: for, if men, inſtead of obſerving the rules contained in the leſſon, (Iſaiah, c. lviii. v. 13, 14,) will ſerve the world, the fleſh, and the devil on the Lord's day; they cannot be expected to ſerve any other maſter, during the reſt of the week.

3. It is obvious, in the next place to mention that profanation of the holy name of God, which marks the character of our age. I do not mean that profane ſwearing, and taking of God's name in vain, which mingles with the common converſation of vaſt multitudes: this is indeed an atrocious affront to the Majeſty of heaven; but it is not peculiar to any age or nation, though more heinous in this favoured land than elſewhere. I advert, however, to the horrid crime of direct perjury;

which perhaps never was ſo frequent in any age of the world, as it is at preſent. The extreme impolicy of multiplying oaths on every occaſion, that pervades and diſgraces the whole of our juriſprudence; and the ſhameful irreverence, with which they are generally adminiſtered, concur in deducting from the ſolemnity of the tranſaction; and men are induced to conſider an oath at a matter of courſe, rather than an expreſs appeal to the heart ſearching God, to atteſt the truth and ſincerity of what is alledged. Thus, not only men of ſcandalous lives are involved in the guilt of perjury, but multitudes who are in other reſpects of good repute: ſo that it may be apprehended, oaths are often taken by pariſh officers, by jurymen, by electors, nay, by thoſe who are elected to ſerve in parliament, and by many other deſcriptions of men, without any due conſideration of their import, or any proper ſenſe of their obligation! And who can compute how many thouſands of times, in the courſe of a ſingle week, the God of heaven is called to witneſs the truth of what is not known to be ſtrictly true; and the ſincerity of men in thoſe engagements, which they never intend literally and exactly to comply with? It is a form, with which they comply as others do; and when the engagement is violated, the numbers concerned keep one another in countenance. Thus, "becauſe of ſwearing the land "mourneth;" and the perjuries, and profanations of the name of the Lord, which abound in every place, loudly call for divine vengeance upon us; eſpecially as no care is taken to bring the offenders to juſtice, or to remove the occaſions of ſuch atrocious impiety.

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4. We muſt not here paſs by that trifling with ſolemn ſubſcriptions and engagements, which often hannects with men's admiſſion into holy orders or eccleſiaſtical preferments. To ſubſcribe articles which men do not believe in the obvious ſenſe of the words, and which they mean to oppoſe; to avow themſelves "moved by the holy Ghoſt to "take on them" the ſacred miniſtry, when ſecular motives alone induce them to chuſe that line of life; to ratify this equivocating profeſſion by receiving the Lord's ſupper; to read a liturgy, and in their ſermons and converſation to contradict what they have uttered on their knees before God; and then to palliate and vindicate ſuch a ſyſtem of prevarication and hypocriſy: this, I ſay, muſt conſtitute a degree of guilt of no common atrocity. And I deem myſelf the more bound to ſpeak on this ſubject, becauſe I only deſcribe my own conduct in times paſt; and I verily believe, that in this reſpect I added more to the aggregate of our national guilt, than in any other action of my life; though in manifold inſtances I ſee abundant cauſe on this occaſion, to abaſe myſelf in the ſight of God, as one of that guilty land, which this day deprecates his righteous indignation, with prayer and faſting.*

But indeed, many other things, which continually are practiſed, and connived at, in men's entrance into

* It may be needful to mention, that I have ſince, been led moſt cordially to embrace the doctrines, I then rejected; or elſe I ſhould have deemed it my duty to quit the ſituation, which I had ſurreptitiouſly obtained in the Church of England.

into holy orders, and in their obtaining and holding livings and preferments, are utterly incompatible with either piety, truth, or righteouſneſs. That in theſe reſpects, "profaneneſs goes forth from the "prieſts to all the inhabitants of the land:" and whilſt infidels adduce ſuch facts among their beſt arguments againſt religion; we cannot wonder that profligate men will proſtitute the ordinance of the Lord's ſupper as a ſtep to preferment; or that ſuch a ſcandal to our church eſtabliſhment is allowed to ſubſiſt among us. Theſe things are ripening us apace for judgments, and filling up the meaſure of our iniquity.

5. Covetouſneſs, fraud, lying, and oppreſſion of the poor, have hitherto been ſo general in all ages and nations, and have ſo connected with the commercial dealings of ungodly men; that it might appear an empty declamation, ſhould I inſiſt upon them on this occaſion. One particular, however, muſt not be omitted; I mean the execrable and execrated ſlave trade. Whilſt the extreme iniquity and cruelty of this commerce, and its fatal effects on three quarters of the globe at leaſt, but eſpecially throughout the vaſt continent of Africa, were little known or regarded; it might be conſidered as the guilt of individuals, and not a national iniquity: but now, that the monſter has been dragged forth to public view, and all the world hath been ſhewn, beyond poſſibillity of palliation, the multiplied murders, cruelties, and enormities that are inſeparable from it's exiſtence; to ſet it up, as another Moloch, to be immolated by myriads of human ſacrifices every year, merely on a falſe or dubious perſuaſion of national emolument,

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is ſuch a renunciation of all juſtice, truth, humanity and mercy, for the ſake of filthy lucre, as can hardly be equalled in the annals of mankind. What then muſt be its criminality in this favoured region of light and liberty? "Blood defileth the land, in "which it is ſhed; neither can it be cleanſed from "it, ſave by the blood of him that ſhed it," (Num. c. xxxv. v. 33:) and the caſe cannot be altered by the mere circumſtance of the blood being ſhed at a diſtance, by the inhabitants of this nation. So that the unavenged blood of thouſands of poor negroes cries daily from the earth unto the Lord, againſt the inhabitants of Great Britain; and will continue to do ſo, more and more, until this atrocious evil be completely terminated; and murder, rapine, and cruelty be no more ſanctioned by our legiſlature: or until the Lord take the matter into his own hands; and we learn to our coſt, that honeſty and mercy are the beſt policy; and that oppreſſion of the poor and helpleſs can never enrich, but will certainly ſink every nation that ſanctions them.

In vain do we faſt and pray, unleſs we "looſe "the bands of wickedneſs, undo the heavy bur-"dens, and let the oppreſſed go free." (Iſaiah, c. lviii. 5. 6:) for whilſt lucrative ſins are perſiſted in, our repentance can only reſemble that of Pharaoh, who cried out, "I have ſinned," but would not conſent to liberate the oppreſſed Iſraelites. Without attention to ſuch plain duties; how can we call this a faſt, or an acceptable day to the Lord?

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After such an overgrown evil, and bloodshed on so large a scale, it may almost seem an approach to trifling, when I proceed to mention the blood shed in duels, and not avenged by the death of the murderer. Whilst so many thieves are put to death, by a policy not authorized in the word of God, and evidently not attended with his blessing: almost the worst of murderers are suffered to escape! But let magistrates, and jurymen look to it, how they will answer it to God; if under the term of manslaughter, they liberate the malicious murderer, and so abet duelling; which is one of the greatest outrages against both the law and gospel of God, which can almost be conceived.

6. Among other national sins, it will perhaps excite surprise, that I mention the luxury and extravagance of the age. I mean not, however, to inveigh against all those excesses, which, though indeed very criminal, are not peculiar to the present times. I advert to the prevailing disposition of all orders in the society to emulate their superiors, till all distinction of rank is nearly lost. By a variety of methods, which are useful to a certain degree in a commercial country, credit may be acquired to a very large extent: men, therefore, possessed of small property, engage in business disproportionately large; and then launch out in their expenditure, according to their *apparent*, not their *real* circumstances. They vie with each other, and with persons of real affluence, in their houses, furniture, appearance, attendants, and entertainments: they frequent expensive public diversions, (which are multiplied beyond the example of former times,)

times,) and they join in every fashionable vanity: till at length their accumulated debts weigh them down, and multitudes are ruined along with them. This is come to such a pitch, that it threatens the destruction of credit itself, and commerce with it; and the effect may possibly prove the punishment of our other sins.

The case is similar with the inferior orders: servants emulate their masters: their wages are lavished away in needless expences; so that old age or sickness finds them destitute, or their death leaves families unprovided for. The evils, which originate from this source, can scarce be enumerated: it concurs with other things to produce that spirit of gaming, which ruins numbers, and often terminates in suicide: and it is a principal cause of those varied methods of fraud and robbery, which fill our jails with wretched inhabitants, and make way for so many lamentable executions: whilst the other national sins, that we are about to consider, greatly originate from this prolific source of vice and misery.

7. Of these we may next mention the venality, which so greatly degrades our national character, and threatens even the subversion of our excellent constitution. Whilst men in general live above what they can afford, they will certainly be tempted to grasp at gain from every quarter; and in general, a sufficient compensation will determine them to any measures or any party. Thus things are now come to that pass, that few of those, who elect members to serve in parliament,

honeſtly vote for the wiſeſt and moſt upright men that are propoſed to them, without expecting any other compenſation than their faithful endeavours to ſerve their country; but by far the greateſt number, in other places, beſides the ſmall boroughs, expect to be paid, in ſome way or other, for their votes: and ſo great is the ſelfiſh ingenuity, that is exercíſed in evading the laws, that no method hath yet been found effectual for preventing ſuch bribery. How then can it be expected that the ſenate ſhould be very uncorrupt? For, whilſt the people, like Eſau, ſell their birth-right for a morſel of meat, or other paltry conſiderations; *they* have ſcarce a right to complain, if they find others as venal as themſelves: and ſurely *they* at leaſt muſt expect, that thoſe perſons, who have purchaſed the diſtinction of legiſlators at an almoſt inſupportable expence, will endeavour to indemnify themſelves, by the uſe they make of their talents, votes, and influence. This evil ſpreads ſo wide, and pervades all orders of men to that degree, that we may enquire with the prophet, "Who is there among you, that would ſhut "the doors for nought?" (Mal. c. i. v. 10.) And it is a ſad proof of the debility, which hath ſeized upon our moral and religious conſtitution; for "the whole heart is ſick, and the whole heart is "faint," through this inveterate diſeaſe, which is the genuine offspring of luxury and extravagance, connected with avarice; an inſatiable rapacity in getting, and a profuſe prodigality in ſpending.

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7. The daring licentiouſneſs, that prevails among us, is another moſt deplorable evil. The unexampled effrontery, with which the trade of proſtitution is conducted; the multitudes, who yearly in the prime of life fall ſacrifices to it; the wide ſpreading effects of it on domeſtic life; the exceeding frequency of adultery; the encouragement given to ingenious women of profligate character, to publiſh their infamous memoirs; with many other particulars that might be adduced, evince that the licentiouſneſs of the preſent age differs from that, which muſt be expected in the general courſe of human affairs. There will indeed be abandoned men and women, ſo long as ungodlineſs prevails: but ſurely they might be driven out of our ſtreets, into their dark receſſes, in ſome degree at leaſt; and ſalutary regulations might prevent the morbid part of the community from diffuſing the fatal contagion ſo rapidly as is done at preſent! It is indeed ſaid, by way of objection, that worſe and more fatal effects would probably enſue, from ſuch an interpoſition: but I apprehend the reaſon to be inſufficient, and that it is incumbent on legiſlators and magiſtrates to adopt ſome method of diſcountenancing ſuch deſtructive practices; and to leave the event to God. However, the very objection ſhews the awful ſtate to which we are reduced, and what cauſe we have to fear, leſt we ſhould ſpeedily become like Sodom and Gomorrah; only much more inexcuſable, becauſe of our ſuperior advantages.

I ſhall conclude this part of our enquiry (not becauſe the ſubject is exhauſted, but becauſe want of time requires it,) by mentioning,

8. Laſtly. The ſaid abuſe, that is made of the goſpel by thoſe, who profeſs to believe it.

If the name of a chriſtian hath been rendered odious to Pagans and Mahometans, throughout the earth, by the crimes of men who bore, and diſgraced, that appellation; the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel alſo, have been grievouſly expoſed to contempt and obloquy, in our land, by the atrocious miſconduct of many, who have zealouſly contended for them. "Woe be to the world be-"cauſe of offences!" indeed we have all need of humiliation before God this day, becauſe we have failed of recommending the doctrine of God our Saviour to others, by our example, as we ought to have done; and, becauſe in ſome reſpects, we have increaſed their prejudices by our miſconduct. But I more eſpecially advert to the notorious diſhoneſty, and other ſcandalous crimes, which have been diſcovered in the habitual conduct of zealous diſputers for evangelical tenets; the total diſregard for relative duties, which many hath manifeſted; the looſe antinomian tenets, by which this laxity of practice has been varniſhed over; and the bitter, boaſting, cenſorious, and backbiting ſpirit, with which religious controverſies have been conducted. Theſe, and various other, abuſes of the goſpel, have furniſhed infidels with their moſt formidable weapons againſt the truth; have given countenance to thoſe, who ſubſtitute a decent proud morality, in the place of repentance, faith, and holineſs; and have quieted the minds of careleſs perſons with the idea, that religion would rather make them worſe than better; and led them to conclude, that there is no reality in it, ſeeing they can detect ſo much hypocriſy,

hypocriſy, in mens profeſſion of, and zeal for, the goſpel.

And now, if we take theſe things together, comparing them with our national advantages and obligations, will it not be evident, that "when the "Lord looked for grapes, he hath found wild "grapes?"

We proceed, therefore, to enquire.

IV. What conſequences may be expected, notwithſtanding the Lord's long ſuffering, unleſs proper means be uſed to prevent them?

The context expreſſly anſwers this queſtion; the Lord himſelf declares what he will do to his vineyard, "I will," ſays he, "take away the hedge "thereof, and it ſhall be eaten up; and break "down the wall thereof, and it ſhall be trodden "down; and I will lay it waſte; it ſhall not be "pruned, nor digged; but there ſhall come up "briers and thorns: I will alſo command the "clouds, that they rain no rain upon it." If we provoke the Lord by our ingratitude, to withdraw from us his providential protection; our fleets, our armies, and all the advantages of our ſituation, will do nothing to prevent our falling under a foreign yoke, or having our land deſolated by hoſtile invaſions. We may alſo be left to learn from experience the ſore judgments of famine, peſtilence, and other deſolating ſcourges. But it will ſuffice, if the Lord in anger ſhould leave us to ourſelves, and to our mad paſſions, or infatuated counſels. We ſhould

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in that caſe ſoon throw away our mercies with our own hands; every man's ſword would be turned againſt his brother; we ſhould ſpeedily be plunged into the horrors of civil war, and witneſs ſuch maſſacres and deſolations, as we can ſcarce bear to read of, in the accounts we receive from a neighbouring nation. The invaſion of Judea by the Chaldeans, the ſiege, taking, plundering, and deſtroying of Jeruſalem, with the ſubſequent Babyloniſh captivity: and the final ruin of that devoted city by the Romans, whilſt 1100,000 perſons miſerably periſhed during the ſiege; together with the calamities which followed the remnant of the Jews, in their diſperſion through the nations, and their condition to this day, conſtitute a ſolemn warning to us, above all people on the face of the whole earth.

But we have moſt reaſon to fear, leſt we ſhould be deprived of the goſpel, which we have ſo much deſpiſed or abuſed; leſt "the kingdom of God "ſhould be taken from us, and given to a nation, "bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. c. xxi. v. 43.) In this reſpect our ſin may very probably become our puniſhment: the wide diffuſion of infidel and heretical principles, (of which politics are at preſent a very convenient vehicle,) may at length be permitted totally to eclipſe the light of the goſpel, and leave us to ſink into heathen impiety and irreligion. This is the more to be dreaded; becauſe theſe principles get ground ſo rapidly, in thoſe families, congregations, and ſeminaries, where the doctrines of the goſpel have long been ſupported. The riſing generation, is, in many places, apparently diſpoſed to change the religion

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of their fathers, for modern improvements of the faith; and great pains are taking to train them up accompliſhed paſtors, according to their own hearts. Thus we may reaſonably fear, that the Lord's vineyard will be laid waſte, and only bear thorns and briers; and in that caſe, he will ſurely "command "the clouds to rain no rain upon it." (Heb. c. vi. v. 7, 8.)

Such of us, as are paſt the meridian of life, may perhaps hope, that the light will not be removed in our days: but we may well tremble for our children; leſt they ſhould be left, as a part of this guilty nation, to prefer man's devices to the ſure teſtimony of God: and leſt the candleſtick ſhould be removed from this land, after the example of the churches of Aſia. (Rev. c. ii. iii.) This ſpiritual judgment is more to be feared, than war, famine or peſtilence; than ſubjection to a foreign conqueror, or a domeſtic tyrant; nay, than the fury of an ungoverned multitude, the horrors of anarchy, and the cruelties of factions, contending with, and by turns prevailing againſt and wreaking their vengeance on each other. But if the Lord be provoked to withdraw his goſpel, he will depart from us in other reſpects, and "woe be to us, if he de-"part from us."

It is vain to ſay, that miniſters in former times have dolefully foreboded the ſame things; and yet we are preſerved, and proſper. "Becauſe ſentence "againſt an evil work is not executed *ſpeedily*; "therefore, the hearts of the ſons of men are

"wholly

" wholly ſet in them to do evil." (Eccles. c. viii. v. 11) Doubtleſs the unbelieving Iſraelites would urge the ſame objection againſt the meſſages of the prophets, when the threatened vengeance was mercifully delayed: no wonder then, if " in theſe laſt " days there are ſcoffers, walking after their own " luſts; and ſaying, where is the promiſe of his " coming? (2 Pet. c. iii. v. 3, 4.) But though " the Lord be long ſuffering and ſlow to anger, he " will by no means acquit the wicked:" and he will ſurpriſe them by his judgments, when they leaſt expect them. If we decide about *the time*, when national puniſhment will be inflicted, we exceed our commiſſion: but if we declare that " except we " repent, we ſhall periſh," as Iſrael did, we only ſay what the Lord hath commanded us. Many a time did he deliver his ancient people, when they " provoked him with his counſel, and were brought " low by their iniquity;" yet, at length " wrath " came upon them to the uttermoſt;" and ſo it will upon us, if we copy their example, and do not uſe proper means of averting his indignation. And this leads me to enquire,

V. What withholds theſe judgments at preſent, and prolongs our national mercies?

I would not willingly aggravate, or palliate any thing in our national character; but would impartially and ſimply ſtate the doctrine of God's word on this important queſtion, ſo far as I am capable of diſcovering it. We may, therefore, ſafely allow, that there is a bright, as well as a dark ſide, belonging

ing to our ſubject; and it is far more agreeable to diſcuſs this, than ſome of the preceding topics. Our meaſure of iniquity, alas, fills apace; but it is not yet full: nay, many favourable circumſtances may be deſcried, which give ſome ground for hope, that we may yet be preſerved; if by any means a proper attention to the important concern can be excited in the minds of the inhabitants of our favoured land.

1. Then, we obſerve with heart-felt ſatisfaction, that perſecution of the church of Chriſt is no part of our national guilt: at leaſt, ſhould any defects in our laws be called by ſo harſh a name; we may rejoice, that a bleſſed inexperience of greater ſeverities occaſions our noticing ſuch trivial deviations from the ſyſtem of complete toleration, which hath been introduced among us.

When God hath a number of ſpiritual worſhippers in any country, and they are permitted to live unmoleſted, and to follow the dictates of their conſciences in his ſervice; I apprehend, that ſomething muſt ſtill be wanting to render that nation ripe for vengeance; and that the prayers offered by believers, for the peace of the land in which they enjoy peace, will continue to prevail: until they be removed from the evil to come; or until a departure from tolerating principles drive them away, or bring them under the yoke of oppreſſion. Herod, to his other crimes, added yet this *above all*, that he ſhut up John Baptiſt in priſon, and put him to death. It was the principal charge brought againſt the nation of Iſrael, that they murdered the Lord's prophets, and perſecuted his faithful ſervants: and

the crucifixion of Chriſt, with the violent rage and cruel enmity of the Jews againſt his diſciples, filled up the meaſure of their iniquity, when wrath came upon them to the uttermoſt: nay, the abominations of myſtic Babylon would not have been complete, had ſhe not been "drunken with the blood "of the ſaints, and of the martyrs of Jeſus." We may, therefore, conſider the tolerating ſpirit, that at preſent prevails in our land, as a very favourable circumſtance, and an encouragement and obligation to pray for the continuance of its peace and proſperity.

2. We may remark, that chriſtianity, as it hath of late years been diſplayed among us, has produced great effects in rectifying the judgments, and in ſome things meliorating the diſpoſitions of vaſt multitudes, who are very far from being the genuine diſciples of the Lord Jeſus. Hence it ariſes, that humanity and philanthropy conſtitute a part of our national character, *as it is diſplayed at home*: would to God, it were equally manifeſt and undeniable in all our concerns with other nations, throughout the whole earth!

However, the benevolence and liberality, with which diſtreſs in every form obtains relief in Britain, ſhould be noticed with due commendation, and cordial ſatisfaction: and this benign and friendly ſpirit hath lately been very honourably exerciſed, in the hoſpitable entertainment given to the poor deſtitute outcaſts, who have ſought an aſylum in this country, and who by nation and religion might have been conſidered as inimical to us.

We are not indeed authorized to expect, that liberality, when unconnected with repentance, faith, love to Chriſt, and true holineſs, will be a man's paſſport to heaven; for thoſe acts of kindneſs, which the Judge will adduce at the great day, as the reaſon of his people's admiſſion to their inheritance, are evidently ſuch as ſpring from faith in him, working by love, and manifeſting itſelf by kindneſs to his diſciples for his ſake. Nevertheleſs we may hope that the Lord will recompence the mercy ſhewn to the poor in this land, "by the "lengthening of our tranquillity," (Dan. c. iv. v. 27:) for he commonly rewards external ſervices with temporal benefits; even when he diſapproves of the motives and principles, from which they reſult; (1 Kings, c. xxi. v. 29.)

3. The infidelity, impiety, perjuries, oppreſſions, and cruelties, before enumerated, have not been let paſs, without a ſolemn and earneſt proteſt being entered againſt them, both in the ſenate, and from the pulpit and the preſs: and this helps to retard our doom. Men have ſtood forth, like Phinehas, inſpired with zeal for the honour of God, and the authority of his law, as well as influenced by the moſt enlarged philanthropy; and they have ſpared no pains, ventured all conſequences, and perſevered amidſt reproaches and diſcouragements, in bearing teſtimony againſt inveterate evils, and labouring for their extirpation: and it ſeems to be the doctrine of ſcripture, that whilſt a conſiderable remnant of princes, prieſts, or prophets, endeavour to ſtem the torrent of national iniquity, the meaſure of that people's ſin is not full: at leaſt, until it be finally decided, that their efforts have been in vain, and

done nothing but expoſe them to public ſcorn and hatred. This is at preſent a favourable ſymptom in our caſe: may the Lord increaſe the number of ſuch witneſſes for truth and righteouſneſs, in every part of our land! and may he proſper all their endeavours to do good!

4. Notwithſtanding the general prevalence of ſceptiſm and infidelity; yet the number of thoſe, who preach the "faith once delivered to the ſaints," is ſuppoſed by many competent judges to be upon the increaſe: now if this be indeed the caſe, and if they, of whom good hopes are formed, do not diſappoint them, either through the faſcinations of the world, the fear of man, or the ſpirit of error; we may even look for ſuch a revival of pure religion, and, reformation of manners, as will not only lengthen our tranquillity, but avert the judgments that we fear.

5. There is no doubt a very conſiderable number of true chriſtians, diſperſed throughout the land: theſe "are the ſalt of the earth, and the "light of the world;" they are habitually "ſigh-"ing and mourning for the abominations that pre-"vail;" and are now called forth, as an embodied militia, to unite in prayers, with humiliation and faſting, in behalf of our guilty land. Whatever hypocriſy or formality may, therefore, be found in the ſervices of multitudes, on this occaſion, or however ſtill greater numbers may totally neglect it; (one of which muſt always be the caſe, where large bodies of men are concerned;) yet very bleſſed things may be expected in anſwer to the prayers, and in conſequence of the ſervices, of this day.

Moreover

Moreover theſe perſons are employed, in their ſeveral places, to counteract the progreſs of infidelity, impiety, and vice, and to ſpread the goſpel of Chriſt. They are indeed "our chariots and "horſemen," in whom our chief ſtrength conſiſts: and if ten righteous perſons would have preſerved Sodom and the neighbouring cities, had ſo many be found in them; and if Paul prevailed for all who ſailed with him: we may yet hope, that the Lord will ſpare the land; in which ſo many thouſands of true believers may doubtleſs be found, who are now uniting their earneſt requeſts in its behalf. In the cloſe of the deplorable American war, when our reſources ſeemed almoſt exhauſted, and four formidable powers combined againſt us; the Lord anſwered the prayers of his people, and we were both delivered, and reſtored to proſperity. When ſome years ſince, our juſtly beloved Monarch was afflicted in a very diſtreſſing manner, and every ſerious mind was ready to forebode ſome fatal conſequences, from the divided ſtate of the land: the Lord again heard prayer, graciouſly reſtored him, and diſpelled our fears: and of late, when our ingratitude again provoked his indignation; there ſeemed to be juſt ground of apprehenſion, that the people, inſtigated by ignorant or crafty inſinuations, would have madly thrown away their invaluable advantages, and plunged us into the moſt dreadful confuſion; but the Lord hath again anſwered our ſupplications, and we are hitherto preſerved. "O that men would, therefore, "praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs, and declare the "wonders that he doeth for the children of men!"

But

But we cannot tell how long the caſe may be thus with us: ſin is the only enemy we need fear; the impious principles of our adverſaries are in reality more formidable, than either their arms or their politics; and if, to the many evil leſſons we have learned from them, we ſhould copy their example of avowed, and general irreligion and infidelity, after having ſo long enjoyed the full advantage of divine revelation: then our meaſure of iniquity will be full; the few remaining believers and witneſſes for Chriſt will be either removed to heaven, or expoſed to perſecution; the floodgates of divine judgments will be opened, and we ſhall be made a warning to other nations, not to abuſe ſuch privileges, or thus to weary out the patience of the Lord of Hoſts: which leads me to enquire,

VI. Laſtly, What thoſe duties are, to which we are called in the preſent circumſtances, according to our different ſituations in the church, and the community?

It is requiſite in this way to bring the ſubject home to each of us; otherwiſe the enumeration of crimes committed by others, and even by ſome of our ſuperiors, might prove a gratification to a cenſorious temper, and foſter our pride inſtead of leading us to humiliation: but if we duly apply it to our own caſe, it will produce very different effects. For, when we recollect, that all who concur in, or neglect the proper means of preventing, atrocious crimes, in ſome degree participate the guilt; we ſhall be convinced, that we all are criminal, as to ſome or many of thoſe things, which have this day been

been conſidered; and that we owe a duty to our native land, to which we have not hitherto ſufficiently attended.

1. It is incumbent on each of us, to examine every part of our conduct, in order to perſonal humiliation, repentance, and amendment. In this review, we ſhould particularly reflect upon the whole of our paſt lives, and all our conduct towards God and our neighbours, according to the various relations that we have ſuſtained, and the tranſactions in which we have been engaged. All our thoughts, words, and actions, as far as we can recollect them; all our negligences, and omiſſions of duty; our miſimprovement of time and talents; the bad effects of our example and converſe; and our moſt ſecret ſins, (as well as the more open and groſs,) ſhould be adverted to; and eſpecially we ought to look carefully into every part of our behaviour, and the ſtate of our ſouls, at the preſent time. Such a thorough ſcrutiny, attended by earneſt prayer to the heart-ſearching God, to ſhew us what our character is in his ſight; and conducted according to the perfect rule of his holy word, will convince us, that no ſmall ſhare of the national guilt hath been contracted by us; and that the whole charge of infidelity, irreligion and iniquity does not belong to others only, but in a meaſure to us alſo; that we have helped to ripen the nation for divine judgments: and that we have more cauſe, than the beloved prophet had, to confeſs *our own ſins*, as well as the ſins of our people, (Dan. c. ix. v. 20.)

This examination, and theſe diſcoveries ſhould be connected with deep ſelf-abaſement in the ſight of

of God; ingenuous confeſſions of all our ſins, and the manifold aggravations of them; and acknowledgments that "we are unworthy of the leaſt "of his mercies," and deſerving of his indignation: we ſhould ſolemnly renew our acceptance of his ſalvation, and ſurrender of ourſelves to his ſervice, (if we have previouſly been acquainted with that important tranſaction, between a believing penitent and his merciful God and Saviour:) we ſhould earneſtly ſeek to him for grace, to enable us to amend our lives, and to attend to every part of our duty: and we ſhould deprecate his wrath, and beſeech him, that our native land may not be expoſed to his judgments, through our tranſgreſſions.

Such ſeaſons of deep humiliation, perſonal or public, have, in every age of the church, been accompanied with faſting; an abſtinence from animal indulgence, or even from all food, when that will conſiſt with health, and the performance of other duties: and our Lord hath given directions about faſting, as occaſionally incumbent on his diſciples. We thus emphatically confeſs, that we have forfeited all right to the gifts of providence; whilſt "we chaſten ourſelves with faſting," we expreſs our humble ſubmiſſion to the juſtice of God in our condemnation, and our chearful acceptance of his correction; we mortify our animal nature, and teach our appetites to brook denial, even in things lawful, whenever inexpedient; and this favours abſtraction from worldly concerns, and marks the ſeaſon to be appropriated to ſuch ſuperior engagements, that attention to animal recreation ſhould be ſuſpended, as much as poſſible. The acceptance which nations, cities,

cities, and individuals, have ever met with, in thus turning to the Lord with weeping, faſting, and prayer, is a ſufficient reaſon, that we ſhould ſeek him in the ſame way; and a confutation of thoſe, who would repreſent faſting to be a phariſaical and needleſs obſervance.

2. We are called upon, to improve our talents, and uſe our influence, in ſtemming the torrent of infidelity, impiety, and vice; and ſuppreſſing, if poſſible, thoſe enormities, which are the ſcandal of our nation and holy religion, and in promoting the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs.

The miniſters of Chriſt, as watchmen and ſtewards of the *myſteries of God*, have their peculiar line of ſervice: and woe be to them, if they preach not *the goſpel*, inſtantly and faithfully, not pleaſing men, and not ſhunning to declare the whole counſel of God: The legiſlator and magiſtrate may bear their teſtimony, and exert their diligence, in another way, and in different places. They, who are entruſted with ſuperior abilities and learning, ſhould not "bury their talent in the earth," but occupy with it, as thoſe who expect the coming of their Judge. The affluent may uſe their eſtates, and the influence derived from them, to good purpoſe; if they conſiſtently endeavour, by every means, to diſcountenance vice and irreligion, and to recommend piety and righteouſneſs to all around them. The merchant may render commerce ſubſervient to the noble deſign of propagating chriſtianity, and diſſeminating the word of God in diſtant regions; thus counteracting the effects of the crimes perpetrated by nominal Chriſtians among Pagans and Mahometans. They,

who have families, ſhould, by their example, converſe, and inſtructions, labour to imbrue their minds with good principles, and to lead them to holy practice. Every man has his circle, in which he poſſeſſes ſome influence, which may either be abuſed to bad, or improved to good purpoſe. Few induſtrious perſons are ſo poor, but they may ſpare a trifle from needleſs expence, to promote the goſpel, the diſperſion of pious books, and ſuch other deſigns, as counteract the endeavours of thoſe, who diſſeminate error and vice among mankind: nor will the poor widow's two mites be overlooked, when conſecrated to ſuch ſervices.

Thus, every man, in his proper place and duty, (like officers and ſoldiers, conſtituting a well diſciplined army,) may contribute to promote that reformation of manners and prevalence of religion, which alone can enſure the continuance of our national proſperity: and, though the attempts of each perſon, ſeparately conſidered, may appear trivial; yet the united efforts of a large multitude, engaged in the ſame cauſe, as with one heart and ſoul, may, by the bleſſing of God, produce extenſive and durable effects. But,

3. They, who can do little elſe, may be helpful by their prayers, for "the effectual fervent "prayer of a righteous man availeth much." All true believers are righteous before God; none of us think more humbly of ourſelves, than they did, who prevailed ſo wonderfully in former ages; and omnipotence can effect its purpoſes by ſecond cauſes, as well as by miracles: if then we pray according to the precepts, doctrines, promiſes, and examples of ſcripture, with a view to the

glory

glory of God, in dependence on his power, truth, and mercy, with ſubmiſſion to his providence, and love to our fellow creatures, and with earneſt importunity and perſeverance; we may be confident that "by the Spirit we offer that effec-"tual, fervent prayer which availeth much."

"Let me alone," (ſaid the Lord to Moſes, when he pleaded with him in behalf of rebellious Iſrael) "that I may deſtroy them in a moment:" he could not, ſo to ſpeak, proceed to take vengeance, unleſs his ſervant would ceaſe to plead for them. Abraham deſiſted from aſking, before the Lord delayed to grant his ſupplications for guilty Sodom. Sennacherub's numerous hoſt was too feeble to withſtand the united prayers of Hezekiah and Iſaiah: nor could Herod's priſon and guards detain, or deſtroy Peter; when time was given to the church to pour out their prayers for him. Do we then hear of good deſigns which ſeem likely to be fruſtrated, through the artifices of the enemy, and their interference with men's ſecular intereſts? Let us remember, that our prayers are appointed, and effectual means of removing theſe impediments: and perhaps the Lord delays the ſucceſs of ſuch deſigns, till he be importuned by the whole multitude of his people: that as he alone can ſend proſperity, or give the bleſſing; ſo the whole glory may thus be given to him, whatever inſtruments he may honour by employing in ſuch beneficial ſervices. It is, however, our bounden duty thus to aſſiſt all, who labour to do good. We ſhould pray, without ceaſing, that the miniſters of Chriſt may be faithful, bold, zealous, prudent, and ſucceſsful; that the Lord would ſend forth labourers into his vineyard; that

pure chriſtianity may be diffuſed on every ſide; that the church may become as "a city that is at unity "with itſelf;" that at this time, "when the ene-"my comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord "may lift up a ſtandard againſt him;" that irreligion and falſe religion may be ſuppreſſed; that Jews, Pagans, Infidels, and Mahometans may be converted; that ſuch as are gone, amidſt manifold dangers and hardſhips, to preach the goſpel, in remote regions, may be protected, ſupported, comforted and proſpered; and that "the earth may ſpeedily "be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the "waters cover the ſea."

We ſhould pray, (not only in the ſervice of the church, but in our cloſets and families;) that the Lord would bleſs our king, and all his counſellors, miniſters, ſenators, and magiſtrates, with wiſdom and grace; that the beſt methods may be taken, to preſerve peace, and promote religion at home; and to extend the ſame bleſſings to the nations abroad. We ſhould intreat the Lord, who hath all hearts in his hands, to diſpoſe the contending parties to peace, and thus prevent the further effuſion of human blood; to ſtem that torrent of iniquity and miſery, which bears down all before it, in the once flouriſhing land of our enemies; that ſo a way may be made for the eſtabliſhment of peace, order and good government, at an equal diſtance from deſpotiſm and anarchy; and that a tolerating ſyſtem may open a door for the ſucceſsful preaching of the goſpel among them: and, in ſhort, we ſhould beſeech him ſo to over-rule preſent calamities, that now "his judg-"ments are abroad in the lands, the inhabitants of "them may learn righteouſneſs."

Charity,

Charity, in all its branches, conſtitutes an important part of our preſent duty, as it was emphatically inculcated in the leſſon for the morning ſervice. But whilſt "we give our bread to the hungry, and bring "the poor outcaſts to our houſes;" we ſhould alſo remember "to forgive our enemies, to bleſs them "that curſe us, to pray for them who deſpitefully "uſe us; and not to be overcome with evil, but to "overcome evil with good."

Theſe are ſome of the principal duties incumbent on us: and in vain does any man pretend to be a patriot, who will not practiſe them: for by his ſins he is helping to bring down divine judgments on the land; and he refuſes to concur in the proper means of averting them. The preparation for, and ſubſequent improvement of, ſuch ſolemn obſervances, conſtitute a principal part of their benefit; and, if due attention be paid to theſe obvious duties, by thoſe in general, who apparently keep this day according to the deſign of it, we may expect important conſequences.

I would conclude with obſerving, that, if there ſhould be any preſent, who have not felt themſelves intereſted in theſe things, and purpoſe not to give heed to them; they may perhaps be preſerved from national judgments, by the humble prayers of thoſe whom they deſpiſe: but without perſonal repentance, faith, prayer, and newneſs of life, they cannot be ſaved from the wrath to come. On the other hand the upright believer need not be diſmayed, on account of thoſe iniquities, over which he ſighs and mourns: for he will be taken care of at all events; ſhould the deluge come in his days, he will be found in the ark, and nothing ſhall ſeparate him from the love of God,

which

which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord. And now, O Father of Mercies, we beſeech thee to give thy bleſſing to the word of all thy miniſters, this day; that there may be joy in heaven over many ſinners brought to repentance; and that thy people may be ſtirred up to greater diligence in every good work, and more fervent zeal for the glory of thy name. Hear the ſupplications, which, with many thouſands of our fellow chriſtians, we have preſented before thee, in behalf of that much favoured, but guilty land, of which we confeſs ourſelves to be guilty inhabitants. O that we may indeed ſhew, by works meet for repentance, that our humiliation this day hath been unfeigned! Avert the judgments which we have deſerved; revive thy work in our land, make true religion to prevail over all oppoſition, and proſper thoſe who labour to do good to men for thy ſake! Have mercy upon our fellow creatures, in other nations, and bid the avenging ſword of bloody war return into its ſcabbard. Pity our infatuated enemies; bring them to repentance, and incline them alſo to turn to thee, with weeping, faſting, and prayer; that ſo, their miſeries may be terminated; the wicked decrees of ſuch as perſiſt in miſchief, be finally diſappointed; and the bleſſings, with which thou haſt long favoured us, be extended to them, and to all other nations; till genuine liberty and peace as the effects of pure chriſtianity, may fill the earth, and bleſs the whole world of mankind! Theſe prayers we preſent before thee, in ſole dependence on the merits and mediation of thy Son Jeſus Chriſt. Now to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt, three Perſons in one myſterious Deity, be aſcribed all glory, praiſe, and adoration, now and for evermore. Amen.

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FINIS.